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WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IMPORTANT TO AGRICULTURE

A radio talk by A. B. Graham, Extension Service, broadcast in the National 4-H Club program, National Farm and Home Hour, Saturday, March 6, 1937, by 70 stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company.

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Do you think you would like a fishless stream, a birdless farmstead, or a squirrel-less woods? We might like to think of all these places as being snakeless, but even then we are led to wonder what that might mean to agriculture.

The backwaters of our flowing streams are quite often the breeding places of many insects, some of which are harmful in transmitting diseases. But the fish in these streams cannot live on water alone, and it is the insects, particularly the mosquito and the young wiggletail, that are held in check every time they supply a square meal to the fish. So stocking our streams and small lakes with fish has its relation to the health of farm people by destroying harmful insects.

How busy are the woodpeckers in their search for insect pests on the bark of our forest and fruit trees. How busy the finches and sparrows in their quest for weed seeds, helping to hold in check the noxious weeds of the yard, garden and field. The thrushes, cuckoos, and orioles are seeking the worms that are so destructive to the young leaves of the trees. Of course the birds cannot completely wipe out either weeds or insect pests, but they help to hold them in check.

A few types of hawks and owls have bad reputations because when their food supply gets short they go after Mrs. Farmer's baby chickens. Of course when they acquire such habits they are "bad actors" and should be killed, but hawks eat many field mice and other rodents that injure our small fruit trees and bushes, and the Who-Who's of the owl should remind us that he is the farmer's friend.

From the farmer's standpoint, the ground hog, prairie dog, coyote, bobcat, and others, must be held in check because they destroy farm products, livestock, and crops. Muskrats may burrow holes in levees built to protect the farmer's field from floods, but they are also of value as fur bearing animals. Many men and boys have made a good living trapping these rodents, thus helping to keep them under control, and have made fur-trimmed and all-fur coats possible for our farm and city women.

The quail, partridge, and wild duck need a place for cover, but need not take up an undue portion of the farm. In Biblical times the reaper left a small part of his field unharvested in order that the gleaner might make a living from what was left. So it is that the farmer might leave some weeds and wild grasses to provide food and cover for these birds, and they, in turn, will earn their board and keep by eating weed seeds and insects.

The stomachs of many snakes, birds, and other animals have been examined by the Bureau of Biological Survey to learn what they feed upon,

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and it has been found that the majority of the ordinary snakes are friends to the farmer. Of course we exclude such poisonous ones as the copperhead, rattlesnake, and moccasin. Like owls and hawks, snakes eat many small animals and insects that are injurious. They are very fond of field mice, pocket gophers, grasshoppers, and other insects. It is true they also destroy some eggs of birds.

However, there are a few forms of wild life which, if unrestrained in their tendencies to multiply, or in seasons of short food supply, become our enemies. Whether we think of our friends in feathers, furs, or fins, we should keep in mind that under normal conditions they help to maintain the balance of life and in the end prove to be man's helper and friend.

We need not only the agricultural benefits of these lower forms of wild life, but we also need their cultural benefits which, perhaps, helps us spiritually more than they do economically.

"Hast thou named all the birds without a gun?" asked Emerson. Yes, we can name them without a gun, and we can help them to live about our homes by leaving cover for the more timid ones; we might build or leave places for their nesting that they may multiply their kind in the spring and summer; that their need for shelter and nesting places may not force them all away from the farmstead.

Try to keep in mind what Lucy Larcom, one of our famous American poets said:

"A nest do you see,
And five eggs hid by me in the juniper-tree?
Don't meddle! Don't touch! little girl, little boy,
Or the world will lose some of its joy!"

